

The Poor Farm

In the years prior to Social Security, Medicare, and financial assistance programs, indigent people were cared for in County-sponsored homes which were supported through taxes and other means of revenue. The National poor house population reached its peak in the 1920's, but by 1923, the number of residents, officially referred to as "inmates", showed a decline. However, in this same year, the Minnesota poor house population, which constituted less than one percent of the states aged, was still on the increase. Eighty-eight percent of Minnesota poor houses/farms were managed by County officials through a salaried superintendent. This appears to have been the practice in 1904 in Anoka County as John D. Wilhelm is shown as "Supervisor of the Poor Farm". The Anoka County Poor Farm was located on this site that consisted of 200 acres. The indigent residents lived here free of charge in exchange for assistance with the farm and household chores. All food stuffs were raised on the farm and any surplus was sold for additional income. There was a vegetable garden, a herd of cows for milk, a flock of chickens, and horses which were used in the farming operation. The Anoka County Farm consisted of a large two-story frame house. The manager and family lived on the ground level with residents occupying the second floor, usually two to a room. On the residents floor was a dining room, cupboard, and sink as well as separate dishes. Food was prepared by the manager's wife and carried to the second floor dining room. It was also the duty of the manager's wife to care for any immobile residents. The farm buildings included a large barn and a silo. The National Old Age Assistance Program was passed in 1935, and its impact was felt by county poor houses since it provided grants on a monthly basis to needy individuals 65 years and older if they did not live in public institutions. The average monthly grant was \$18.40. Almost as soon as the old age assistance became available, many residents moved away from the poor farm in order to qualify for a grant or "pension". Where the number of inmates was small, the farming operation

unprofitable, or the buildings in need of extensive repairs or replacement, the County Board simply closed the facility and disposed of the property. Anoka County closed the Poor Farm in 1936.

Joyce Chapel

On the corner of Hanson Boulevard and 115th Street stands a modest frame building which was built in 1902. It was the first church building in Anoka Township. Many early residents of what is now the city of Coon Rapids were Irish Catholics who attended services at St. Stevens in the town of Anoka. Protestant worshipers also traveled to Anoka or to Champlin to attend the various churches there. In 1900 James Carter, an Anoka blacksmith and member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Anoka, desired to establish a church for the Protestant farmers east of the City. In December 1901 the quarterly conference of the Anoka Methodist Church incorporated the new rural congregation under the name of Joyce Chapel, after Bishop Isaac W. Joyce, Methodist Bishop of Minnesota. B. Shattuck donated a one-half acre site for the church building and cemetery. In January 1902 the corner stone of the chapel was laid by Joseph Holden of Anoka and the work of building began in earnest directed by Erick Johnson. All labor was donated by the members. Using a nail keg as a pulpit, James Carter preached the first sermon to members seated on chairs and boxes brought from home. The nail keg was replaced the following Sunday by a "fine" pulpit made and presented by the Reed and Sherwood Lumber Company of Anoka. Physical ties with the "mother" church in Anoka were severed in November 1909, as Joyce Chapel membership was growing and the congregation as in a stable financial position. It is interesting to note the pastorates of women at Joyce Chapel. One of these women was Reverend Mrs. Ina Gates Stout, a Free Baptist minister, appointed to Joyce Chapel in October 1912. During her pastorate a unique arrangement was initiated. The Baptists of the area, having no church of their own, were invited to organize a class and worship with the Methodists. This was an unusual but workable cooperation between the two groups. Mrs. Stout served as Pastor from 1912 to 1916, during which this cooperative effort of Methodists and Baptists brought a number of improvements in the church. Reverend Stout also organized a

Ladies Aid Society, a Christian Endeavor Society, and a Farmers Club. Reverend Edith Grays, an ordained Methodist minister, who became Pastor when her husband, Reverend Crawford Grays, pastor of the Church of Anoka, became ill and had to curtail his activities. Reverend Edith Grays took over work at Joyce Chapel where she served until 1928. The church and Sunday School flourished under her direction. During her pastorate all outstanding bills were paid in full. In January 1954 the Coon Rapids Village Council authorized the purchase of Joyce Chapel for \$2,500 intended for use as a temporary town hall. The church was demolished in 1999 to widen Hanson Blvd.

Dunn House and Dunn Hotel

On this site the southeast corner of Coon Rapids Boulevard and Egret stood the “Dunn House”. This site has had a progression of houses, kept as hotels for travelers on the United States Military Road (now Coon Rapids Blvd). Stagecoaches and ox cart drivers would use this hotel as they traveled between Anoka and Minneapolis or St. Paul. Prior to 1872 the property was owned by Mary and Isaac Kimball. Isaac Kimball was an early settler of Anoka County having purchased the Inn at Rice Creek in Manomin (now Fridley) from John Banfil in the spring of 1853. Now called Banfil Center for the Arts. He later became the proprietor of the Kimball House in Anoka. In 1872, the Kimball property was sold to Emily P. Campbell, who in turn sold it to John Dunn in 1880. Historical accounts indicate that Isaac Kimball had been in the hotel business as early as 1853 and begun such a hotel on this much-used thoroughfare. By 1872, when the site was sold, traffic on the United States Military Road had trickled to a few travelers, with railway transportation readily available. The property had a large barn, blacksmith shop and the Dunn House Hotel.

Chimney

For many years the chimney of the Minnesota Clay Company stood near this corner of 86th Lane and East River Road – a sentinel of the first locally-based industry in Anoka County. The chimney was 109 feet tall. It stood in lonely dignity on a plat of land surrounded by trees. It aroused curiosity in passersby, but offered minimal dues to its worthy past. In later years the brick chimney served no practical purpose other than a silent tribute to a once prosperous enterprise. Lightning struck and severely damaged the top of the old brickyard chimney during a late evening thunderstorm on Wednesday, June 25, 1980. The following Wednesday, July 2, 1980, the storm-damaged brick chimney was taken down. It was demolished for public safety reasons. The demolished chimney brought down the curtain on the last remembrance of the brick factory operation that was a prominent part of Coon Rapids. Before brick almost all buildings in Anoka County were built of wood. The logging industry provided inexpensive building material in the early years of settlement. The residents realized that fire was a particular danger, due to the number of wood frame houses and businesses. After the fire in Anoka in 1884, which destroyed a greater part of the town, it seemed imperative to rebuild with fireproof material and brick filled this need. So they turned to the brick industry of Coon Rapids. Many of the red brick buildings in the city of Anoka today were built of brick from the Coon Rapids area after the Anoka fire of 1884. The demand for a new type of brick for paving city streets began at the turn of the century and some existing brickyards changed from manufacture of building material to that of paving bricks. These bricks were dense and quite large, being about nine inches by three and one-half inches and were both economical and practical for well-traveled streets. At this location the Minnesota Clay Company had 72 acres of clay deposits which had been bored to a depth of 130 feet without reaching bottom. The company provided a

large boarding house and cottages for workmen with families. This brick plant was one of the most modern and well-equipped in the country, and was located on a spur of the Great Northern, Northern Pacific and Pacific and Eastern Railroads, which facilitated the shipment of bricks. The railroad also freighted the required 27,000 tons of coal and/or 81,000 barrels of oil necessary to run the plant each year.

Coon Rapids Hydroelectric Power Dam

Construction of the Coon Rapids Hydroelectric Power Dam began in January 1913 by the Northern Mississippi River Power Company on choice acreage of the M. E. Dunn Farm on the eastern shore of the Mississippi River in Anoka County near Coon Creek for the purpose of generating electricity to be used in Anoka and Hennepin Counties. The Coon Rapids Dam was completed in late March 1914. The hydroelectric power station house was completed in the late summer of that year and went into service on August 1, 1914. The Dam is made of earth and solid concrete construction resting on steel and wood piling, founded on river sand and a hard pan layer of firm clayish subsoil over bedrock. The total length of the Coon Rapids from the end of embankment to the end of the other is approximately 2,150 feet. Over 42,000 cubic yards of concrete went into the Dam and over 800 carloads of crushed rock were required. The concrete spillway section is 1,070 feet long with 28 gates, each 33 feet wide, with four sluice gates and one log sluice. The height of the Dam above the lowest point of the original bed stream is 13 feet. The million dollar power plant is built on the east side of the river. Fifty men were hired to begin the project. Three months later a village had developed around the Dam site including bunkhouses, mess halls, quarters for official, a school, a hospital, and even its own sewer system. All the amenities of the city life were present including fires, weddings, births, deaths, crime, social events, as well as a 30-branch private telephone exchange. One thousand men were now at work on a round-the-clock schedule, 75 percent of who were from Anoka County. Stewart W. Laird was in charge of the construction. Upon completion of the Dam he became superintendent of the plant, a position held for over 25 years. Work on the Dam was nearly completed by December 1913, and only a few men were retained through the winter. The numerous camps, stores, offices, sheds, etc. were sold to W.H. LaPlant of Anoka. The "city" by the river was gone

and the engineers, laborers, carpenters, and machinists departed. Electrical demands, due to the rapidly developing area of service grew so large that by 1966, operation of the plant was no longer feasible. On the 31st of December NSP officially discontinued operation of the Coon Rapids Hydro Generating Station, and generating and transmission equipment was removed from the powerhouse. Ownership of the land and Dam was transferred to the Hennepin County Park Reserve District in 1969 to be developed for park purposes. The Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park now offers recreational and educational opportunities for the people of the metropolitan area. Visitors may choose from the many activities such as hiking boating, fishing, biking, and picnicking. Skiing and snowshoeing are also popular winter activities. In 1977 a walkway was built across the pier points of the Dam to the west side. This is a popular spot for “river watchers” both winter and summer. In 1978 a visitor center was opened which houses offices, a permanent display of the Dam’s history, many seasonal displays, as well as live animals for the enjoyment and information of the public.